

DRAFT

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Subject: 2024 Budget Recommendations and Considerations for Urban Forestry in Seattle

Dear Seattle City Councilmembers,

Adequate funding is essential for good urban forest governance. Given our declining canopy, worsening canopy inequities, and the looming challenges from climate change and biodiversity loss, Seattle's investments in its urban forest are not yet sufficient.

As you begin to turn your attention to the 2024 City Budget, the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) makes these initial recommendations to address critical needs for our urban forest:

1. **Allocate \$200,000 in 2024 to support the Tree Canopy Equity and Resilience plan.** In 2023, the City allocated \$150,000 in one-time funding for a Tree Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan. Conducting the robust community engagement desired as the plan is developed will require additional consultant and research support.

This is a key investment for the city. The Tree Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan will identify the best strategies and locations for planting, growing, and maintaining trees on private and public land and in the right-of-way, with a focus on low-canopy neighborhoods in environmental justice priority areas. It will also support the City in finding future federal, state, and philanthropic funds that support the resilience of the tree canopy.

The City of Philadelphia recently released a similar [plan](#), including a process that involved robust community development. That planning project had a budget of \$315,000.

2. **Provide additional support for the Urban Forestry Commission**
The UFC struggles with lack of funding to equitably engage with community members. Additional staff support is needed as well as a fund to use for stipends for inviting guest speakers, booking community spaces, etc. Some of this additional funding might support additional capacity for UFC work on the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan.
3. **Increase urban forestry-qualified staff capacity at Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection.** The updated tree protection ordinance establishes new processes at SDCI and adds requirements for development permit applicants. This will increase workloads relating to tree regulations. With only two arborists on staff, SDCI is already critically under-resourced with regard to arboricultural expertise.

The UFC recommends adding at least XX additional full-time urban forestry staff at SDCl in 2024.

Commented [JM1]: How many more staff should we recommend?

- 4. Allocate additional funds to meet City's increased tree replacement obligations.** [Executive Order 2023-03](#) – One Seattle Tree Plan (EO) increased the City's tree replacement and maintenance obligations. This will create ongoing additional expenses for the City that were not included in the 2023-2024 biennial budget.

Commented [PB2]: Additional positions will be established through CB 120535; UFC recommendations are that specifically UF-related expertise is needed to be added. Specific need: code compliance inspector that is an arborist.

The UFC recommends that the Council request each department to provide counts of past healthy, site-appropriate trees removed and counts of dead, hazardous, or invasive trees removed. This will could provide a basis for projecting tree replacement budgets.

The EO requires that for each healthy tree removed, three replacement trees be planted. For each dead, hazardous, or invasive tree, two replacement trees are required.

The UFC recommends allocating additional funds for departments required to replace trees, at a level appropriate for the department. For instance, SDOT estimates of five-year planting and establishment costs are \$2,705 per tree. In 2022, SDOT removed 181 trees (Bean 2023). Depending on the condition of the trees, this would require between 362 to 543 replacement trees. The first-year replacement cost would be between \$440,000 and \$660,000 for this single department alone.

- 5. Fund urban forest outreach and education.** The health of our urban forest depends to a large extent on stewardship by tree service providers and individual property owners. The UFC recommends investing in outreach and education to increase community care and concern for trees on private and public property, as well as to communicate about the recent changes to our tree regulations. The UFC recommends adding \$XXX of funding to the Trees for Seattle program to lead an outreach and education campaign.

Commented [PB3]: Patti to consult with T4S program staff for concurrence and suggested investment.

- 6. Fund adequate monitoring and evaluation of the updated tree protection ordinance.** It is essential for the city to monitor and evaluate the impact of the recent update to the tree protection ordinance. As the UFC included in previous recommendations, some of the updates are novel and the potential consequences are unclear. The UFC recommends adding funding in 2024 to support robust monitoring and evaluation of the new tree protection ordinance, including:

- The use by permit applicants of payment in-lieu of tree replacement. A report should include the number of permit applicants that used the payments, payment amounts, total payments collected, City costs related to tree planting and establishment, and any recommendations for changes to the payment amounts to be included in a revised Director's Rule. Recommendations for changes to fee amounts shall include consideration of adequacy of payment amount to replace removed trees, cover City planting and establishment costs, and effects of payment amount on permit applicant decisions about usage of the payment option.

- The use by permit applicants of development standard flexibility to preserve trees. A report should include the number of permit applicants that take advantage of allowed departures from development standards to accommodate tree preservation. A report should include the types of departures used and the number of trees preserved therefrom, as well as the number of trees removed. Species, size, and other information about tree preservation, removal, and replacement shall also be reported. Recommendations for changes to the development standard departures shall include consideration for adequacy of tree preservation, adequate incentives to builders, and effects of hardscape allowance on tree preservation, replanting, and development processes.
- The number and location of replacement trees planted offsite. A report should include descriptions, statistics, and qualitative reports about required replacement trees planted offsite, both through direct replacement by developers or by City efforts funded by the One Seattle tree fund. A report should include information on costs, survivability, and community reception and feedback.
- Identification of unintended consequences. A report should include an assessment of any unintended consequences arising from the implementation of this ordinance, including but not limited to inequitable canopy impacts on Environmental Justice communities; disincentivized tree ownership, stewardship, or proactive management; impacts to the livelihoods of urban forest professionals; and cost and time to developers.
- Recommendations on how this legislation can support the strategies in the forthcoming Tree Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan.
- Reporting on impacts to the urban forest due to climate change including from pests, pathogens, and insects.
- Examination of code's alignment with urban forest management best practices and national standards.

The UFC is happy to meet with you or your staff to discuss budget considerations for urban forestry.

Sincerely,

References

Bean, Katey. "SDOT Urban Forestry March 2023 Briefing to the Urban Forestry Commission." March 1, 2023. Available at [https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/UrbanForestryCommission/2023/2023Docs/SDOTUF Presentation030123.pdf](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/UrbanForestryCommission/2023/2023Docs/SDOTUF%20Presentation030123.pdf)